

Northumbria Research Link

Citation: Turner, Jane (2009) Developing 'authentic leaders' - the leaders' coaching journey. OCM Coach and Mentor Journal, 9. pp. 8-10.

Published by: The OCM Group Ltd.

URL:

This version was downloaded from Northumbria Research Link:
<http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/880/>

Northumbria University has developed Northumbria Research Link (NRL) to enable users to access the University's research output. Copyright © and moral rights for items on NRL are retained by the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. Single copies of full items can be reproduced, displayed or performed, and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided the authors, title and full bibliographic details are given, as well as a hyperlink and/or URL to the original metadata page. The content must not be changed in any way. Full items must not be sold commercially in any format or medium without formal permission of the copyright holder. The full policy is available online: <http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/policies.html>

This document may differ from the final, published version of the research and has been made available online in accordance with publisher policies. To read and/or cite from the published version of the research, please visit the publisher's website (a subscription may be required.)



**Northumbria
University**
NEWCASTLE



UniversityLibrary

Developing 'authentic leaders' – The leaders' coaching journey

Jane Turner

i have been involved in the development of leaders for the past 10 years, initially employed internally within organisations and currently in a Business School environment. Whilst working at orange as leadership development specialist i was intent on assembling the ingredients necessary to enable powerful, perspective changing leader experiences that made a difference to the leader and those they were responsible for leading. i was very aware that many leadership development programmes did not spend sufficient time focusing upon the inner person of the leader.

contributions to the requisite recipe were sought from selected Business Schools, however it was apparent that they sometimes struggled to contribute to the required practitioner perspective as their trajectory was primarily theoretical. This experience made me determined to become involved in powerful and impacting leader development approaches and led to the cohesion of coaching and authentic leader development processes.

moving to current times, leaders are now faced with an organisational landscape of increasing pressure, uncertainty, tension

and stress that requires the ability to demonstrate unprecedented agility and a strong sense of self. There are so many leaders wearing masks and feeling vulnerable and exposed in their roles.

There is ever increasing concern in relation to leadership programmes that are pervaded by regurgitated theories and models that do not develop the leaders concerned.

many leaders are familiar with traits, charismatic, behavioural, situational and transformational leadership etc, yet these theories and models wash over them in

a meaningless way. The overwhelming theoretical leadership context leads to many leadership development programmes that are repetitive, superficial and the equivalent of dipping ones toe in shallow water – quick, relatively painless, and not particularly memorable. lord and hall (2005) suggest that leader development needs to go beyond the acquisition of surface skills and present concern at the lack of research regarding the deeper and slower development of leaders.

recently there have been calls to explore the inner person of the leader. Brown and Starkey (2000) and avolio and Gardner (2005) argue that the existing frameworks are not sufficient for developing leaders

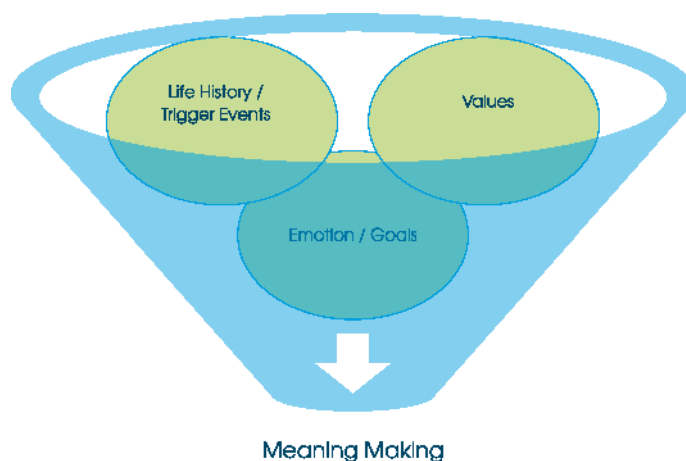
of the future. We need only to look to the current global crisis to see the monumental impact of leaders. indeed, Gardner et al (2005), suggest that the challenges of knowing, showing and remaining true to oneself have never been greater and present the 'authentic leader' concept as an alternative which focuses upon making sense of

- i) life story,
- ii) trigger events,
- iii) values,
- iv) motives and emotion.

The 'authentic leadership' literature presents a more coherent framework for the leader development journey and scaffolds the process by which leaders may achieve greater authenticity, focusing on the 'what' and the 'how'.

as i am now working in a Business School environment and having carried out research into the developmental processes that leaders experience in establishing and sustaining self in the leader role i am confident that i am closer to the requisite ingredients. i am working exclusively with senior leaders and using the elements of the 'authentic leader' framework to scaffold the coaching process. (See figure 1)

Figure 1



Life History/Trigger Events

for example life history and values play the following role in the authentic leader coaching process.

The leader's personal history and key trigger events are deemed to be antecedents for authentic leadership development. The events themselves are deemed to trigger personal growth and development and serve as catalysts for heightened levels of leader self awareness.



At the start of the coaching process, leaders are asked to construct a lifeline focusing latterly within the context of their leader role. The lifelines are talked through leading to powerful and emotional conversations. Leaders quickly synthesise meaning through the construction and articulation of their personal histories. Coaching around the narrative enables leaders to turn the mirror inward and engage in deep reflection characterised by the questioning and challenging of assumptions, values and motives.

Values

Values naturally emerge from the life story and are explored in depth during coaching sessions. Leaders are exposed to other leaders' stories, e.g. Jackie Stewart, formula one world champion; Steve Jobs, cEo Apple – which enables the leaders to explore their own values in the context of others and experience what (Erikson, 1995a, 1995b) refers to as the internalisation of

values, recognising the integration with self.

Coaching ensures that significant time is spent with the leader developing a deeper sense of self and their personal self concept, prior to exploring their leadership. This enables leaders to approach their development from their trajectory and the results are proving powerful in many ways.

For example, a senior leader I will refer to as Adam, was participating in a customised Executive leadership programme underpinned by 1:1 Executive coaching. It was during his first coaching session that we explored his defensive behaviour during the initial taught module. He informed me that he was dyslexic and did not want to partake in the programme but felt he would be left behind if he did not participate. This tension played out for Adam over the coming months and

during his second coaching session, using

the model presented above, I asked him to tell me his life story.

During his account I experienced a powerful sense of him holding back and used the analogy of a swimmer working very hard to keep up with other swimmers to explain my feelings. At this point Adam became rather emotional and presented a trigger event, explaining that he had passed his o-level English exam by learning essay questions by rote prior to the exam, in an attempt to hide his dyslexia. This had left him with the thought that he was a fraud and a resulting pattern of a leader who constantly tried to avoid situations which presented the possibility of pushing him out of his comfort zone.

This proved a very emotional session as Adam explained that he had never discussed the impact of this with anyone but felt huge relief having shared what he referred to as an immense 'burden'.

developing 'Authentic leaders' – The leaders' coaching journey (cont.)

Jane Turner

12 months on and Adam is a very different leader, having identified and worked to make sense of his values through the coaching process, he is engaging in activities that he would have once avoided at all costs, such as a team away day in which he shared his life story with his team and has worked hard to understand the values of each of his direct reports and what is important to them.

To quote Adam "i had never contemplated how my personal history might have shaped the real me. creating the lifeline was challenging and highly revealing – forcing me to "hold up the mirror" and gain an understanding of why i am the way i am, which is invaluable to understand as a leader". "i have become very comfortable in my own skin, resulting in an ability to feel more comfortable with others".

Another example is John, who failing to get the required A level grades for university went back to college to study for re-sits. Six weeks into the term he received a call from the dean of a school at the university to say a student had dropped out of the course and they were now in a position to offer him a place. We explored the thoughts and feelings he experienced during the first morning at university, a trigger event, which 23 years on had left him with the view that he was still undeserving of the place he had been offered and was not 'clever enough'.

Working with John to make sense of his values and identity over the last year has enabled him to move to a place where he feels deserving of his leader role. New opportunities have emerged as a result of him being in a very different place.

This depth of understanding demonstrated by the above examples emerges as a result of deeper slower leader development

intervention, namely coaching. my confidence in the efficacy of this coaching approach stems from the following:

- a) core personal values relating to being

courageous and making a difference,

- b) research findings in which leaders reveal the 'masks' they feel required to wear and the internal angst, in other words the in-authenticity,
- c) being in the privileged position to support leaders in their sense making processes and experiencing firsthand the impact of these conversations.

coaching enables 'deep dive' learning experiences, enabling the leader to make sense of self using elements of the 'Authentic leader' development framework, supporting gardner's view (2005) that the primary emphasis is to build the intrapersonal competence needed to form an accurate model of oneself.

The coaching process enables leaders to approach development from their trajectory, laying a new foundation stone. Starting with the development of the inner person of the leader requires courage, patience and commitment from both parties: those providing leader development experiences and those purchasing them.

References

Avolio, B.J., Gardner, W.L. (2005) *Authentic leadership development: getting to the root of positive forms of leadership. The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 16, pp3 15 - 338

Brown, A.D., & Starkey, K. (2000) *Organizational identity and learning: A psychodynamic perspective. Academy Of Management Review*, 25, 102 - 200.

Lord, R. G., & Hal, R. J. (2005) *Identity, deep structure and the development of*

leadership skill. The Leadership Quarterly. Vol 19, pp591 - 615.

Erikson, R.J. (1995a) *The importance of authenticity for self and society, Symbolic Interaction*, 18(2), 121 - 144.

Erikson, R.J. (1995b) *Our society, our selves: Becoming authentic in an unauthentic*

world, Advanced Development, 6, 27 - 39.

About the author

Jane Turner is Associate dean for the executive development centre at Newcastle Business School at Northumbria university. She is an academically qualified executive coach working with senior leaders in the public, private and third sectors. She advises organisations

on the creation of coaching cultures and helps to build internal coaching capability. Jane is responsible for the Business School's masters in coaching. her research interests are in authentic leader development experiences.

She was previously leadership development Specialist for orange uK and head of hr for Benfield motor group.

Contact:

Jane.Turner@northumbria.ac.uk



